DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 352 654 CS 213 611

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TITLE The Colour of Words.
PUB DATE 24 Apr 91
NOTE 6p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Basic Writing; *Class Activities; College English; *Community Colleges; *English Instruction; Foreign Countries; *Grammar; *Instructional Effectiveness; Secondary Education; Sentence Structure; Teaching Methods; Two Year Colleges; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Basic Writers

ABSTRACT

Students from the ages of 13 or 14 onward need to know the "colours of words" which can let them live fully in the rainbow of life, thus eliminating student fears associated with written language and of being pawns of those who have the power of words, especially written words. Colour coding the eight basic types of work that words can do in a sentence is an easy, fun way for students to learn English grammar. First, students should work on identifying nouns, marking them in red. Purple pronouns and orange adjectives connect to red nouns. Other colors are black for verbs, brown for adverbs, blue for prepositions and so on. Writing assignments in remedial community college classrooms should focus on practical, short assignments like letters to the editor of the newspaper or job application letters. Expanding the ability to use adverbs and adjectives can be done by writing name poems, for which the student puts the letters of a name in a vertical row and writes a descriptive line about that person using the letters. Students can try color-coding advertisements or popular rap songs. Overheads can be used as the instructor edits and corrects actual published materials, many of which contain mistakes and sloppy writing. After completing a program focused on grammar such as this, students often thank the instructor and gain confidence in facing the challenges of the daily world of communication which each of them faces. (A color-coded illustration is attached.) (HB)

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April 24,1991

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THE COLOUR OF WORDS

In order to save our students (and prepare a stable society for our retirement years), we will have to break the law - at least, the rules! The Ontario Ministry of Education mandates that " 10% or less of classroom time will be spent on grammar, spelling, punctuation, and other technicalities", such as the 6 aspects of any word that dictionaries explain.

As community college English teachers are now discussing entrance and exit literacy standards, there is a greater need than ever for shared dialogues and joint planning between secondary and tertiary educators. Many at community colleges strongly suggest (that the 20 - 25% now beginning their college careers in Remedial English classes in order to read and respond in writing to their textbooks) that these semi-illiterate students first attend summer school to improve their literacy deficiencies. Thus a plan is proposed that all community college applicants write in April or May a literacy test; a simple 3 paragraph explanation (from a choice of ideas or theories) can demonstrate one's ability to write clearly.

But what about those thousands of students who leave school at 15, 16, 17 or 18 , even 19 years of age? They believe that there is a mass of slippery, unknowable words which are the tools of their enemies: taxation department, landlord, car dealership, bank loan officer, appliance salesperson, car licence bureau, union steward, boss and social service agencies as well as politicians. These **enemies** write rules and contracts that students - even some Grade Twelve graduates - cannot read nor respond to in writing.

Students from the ages of 13 or 14 onward need to know the colours of words which can let them live fully in the rainbow of life - and not in the drab greyness of unemployment or as a pawn of those who have the power of words, especially the written word.

Colour coding the 8 basic types of work that words can do in a sentence is an easy, fun way for students to learn English grammar. My students begin by underlining or highlighting NOUNS red in their grammar workbooks. Nouns are important to us as the names of family and friends, of our addresses and of our possessions and beliefs. (Yes, soon there will be disks for colour monitor exercises. Also, I know that currently school boards do not buy workbooks!)

In the first week of nouns, my students construct family trees with names and dates, towns and countries, and one favourite item per relative. They create their own unique NOUN tree in their workbook. A classroom world map can star straight pins in each grandparent's place of birth creating an amazing geography lesson that can lead to using the NOUN trees for heritage stories and much else. From that first week, everyone's grammar text is personally his or hers: a reference text that he or she builds for future on-the-job use.

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Grammar exercises and activities are ONLY done in class as a whole or in small groups, but not as homework. (It is difficult to Un-learn incorrect examples from wrongly completed homework.) Students learn by a writing focus on each type of work that words do in a sentence. Purple pronouns and orange adjectives connect to red nouns. The sentence and the paragraph are basic structures that we write and share aloud often. Classes sit in a circle - if at all possible, to face each other as they read aloud. Everyone reads - not just those who love the sound of their own voices. They soon accept sharing.

Short, directed writing activities (compositions) occur in the class and at home each week. Most occupations demand that one can write clear one page reports or letters. The skills of summary (precis) and organization are very important in such communications. So I have my students writing 100 to 500 word useful types of assignments. We write letters-to-the-editors and politicians on topics that concerns us, and we mail them. Then we share our replies. We research jobs, assess ourselves and then write job application letters. We write job contracts for summer or part-time jobs. We read rental and credit card contracts noting the power of " **if, and, but, or** " - the conjunctions. With square green brackets, we set off the conditions or restrictions that <u>subordinate clauses</u> put on our lives in the sentences of such contracts. Sounds dull? No, students get excited when they realize that they can get in control of their lives, even help their parents with contracts.

Sharing family recipes and household methods is another way to integrate a class into a unified group. Writing the detailed, specific methodology for making a favourite food develops good organizational skills. How many variations of Kraft Dinner : pasta, rice or noodle one-pot dinners from around the world can your class record? Descriptive paragraphs can tell where to buy certain ingredients and narratives can tell why the food is cherished by the family or the 'teller'. Yes, classroom international recipe books with helpful household hints can be printed and saved. Explaining the cleaning and maintenance of a possession: a bike, tape deck , or even prized T- shirt, is also a good writing exercise using prepositions. When students try writing methods and procedures without pronouns or prepositions, they learn not only what these words are, but also their usefulness.

My classes do a 7 day personal time vs activity and not dollar budget report. Most are surprised by what they do in 168 hours. A personal budget or Canada Food Rules can be the basis for reports or essays on healthy life styles. Whatever spices or herbs each family uses, that family can still follow a balanced diet. Students who can use the language well understand that the flavour of the food is separate from its vitamin and mineral values. They know there are NO right or wrong foods, NO right or wrong clothes, prayers, exercises, etc., but that such moral judgments are outside of things, the NOUNS themselves. A certain amount of abstract vocabulary is necessary to be able to discuss morals and morality. But if we do not give our students the TOOLS to survive their physical needs, we need not worry about their emotional or spiritual ones.

Fun? Expanding our store of adjectives and adverbs can be done by writing name poems. Put the letters of your name in a vertical row and begin a descriptive line about yourself with each letter as FAST as you can. This should be a 5 minute exercise! After laughter and sharing, rewrites can be done, or new name poems for Best Friend, My Pet, or Worst Enemy, etc.

N - nasty, noble	N - nice, neat
E - ever ready	O - oval eyed
D - daring	R - resourceful
	M - mannerly
	A - apple cheeked

A next step is to write descriptive character studies of one's inner and outer qualities. This is a skill we need for recommendation letters or job application letters and personnel files.

We collect well-known ads and slogans. After identifying adjectives and adverbs in these, we try to decipher what these ads mean! (Coke is it.) We re-write these ads to make them more meaningful for us or we write even more ridiculous ads enjoying the satiric or punning effects of words. We collect a list of class favourite descriptive words with each student adding one word or phrase. Yes, grammar exercises lead to vocabulary building, too.

We write mystery paragraphs which describe favourite locations all over the globe or from our imagination which other students try to name - even if they have to invent a name. Our descriptions have to include data from all physical senses: sight, sound, smell, taste and texture. This supports the idea of abstract and concrete nouns.

In class, I use their offered examples to colour code the sentence on overheads or flip charts or the blackboard. They laughed when I used a student's joke to show a present participle. (What is a lesbian? A woman doing a man's job.) That is also useful for the possessive apostrophe (!) as well as a comment on the cruelty/sexism/racism in most jokes.

You can try colour coding their favourite song or rap piece. Language that communicates is not a confused jumble, "like, ah man, you know, raging, right, Indians, you know, like " etc. Students - people - like to have the security of a pattern to their sentences so they have confidence that they can communicate effectively.

Knowing there are 8 colours or 8 types of work that words do in a sentence is NOT intimidating for students. They all have learned much larger lists. They not only know hundreds of sports people and their achievements, but also that a pitcher takes a turn as a batter or a goalie can even score in a rare game. They can relate grammar to the patterns of sports or of songs or of daily routines. Knowing grammar well enough in order to read and write for the work world is an obtainable goal. Gaining a vocabulary large enough to express one's ideas and emotions clearly first to oneself and then to others is possible. Now winning the Nobel Prize for Literature has not yet happened to a Canadian! To which pot of gold at the end of the rainbow of words are you leading your students?

A once a week focus, deliberate and directed, on spelling and punctuation can be fun if you correct published copy from fan magazines, hockey commentators, fashion editors or comic strips. Editing the examples they bring in from their reading is a good focus.

Grammar can be learned in groups but I do not believe in group design or editing of creative work. Grammar is a shared, agreed upon tool, but individual writing has to mirror only one personality. Wasn't the camel a committee designed horse? Joke stories can be

written by each student adding a line to an unseen narrative that keeps getting folded over with each addition, but group poems are more bland than pablum. So give your students the tools: words and punctuation marks with the patterns of how they work together, and your students will give you all the creative, critical and constructive writing you desire.

Whatever the Ministry of Education does to you for sharing the gold of grammar, your students will thank you for giving them the necessary tools of the language. After my students complete, THE COLOUR OF WORDS textbook, they thank me for making the English sentence understandable. These community college students gain more confidence and cheerfully face the challenges of the work world's written communications. Why not share the rainbow of words with your students?

FOOTNOTE

[1] Lever, Bernice, (1991) TECHNICOLOUR GRAMMAR, **indirections,** (Toronto, Council of Teachers of English) Vol.16, No.1, pp.77-80.

POSTSCRIPT

In my Remedial English community college courses, students earn 40% from grammar tests and 60% from varied written pieces, and at present, 0% from oral sharing and general participation. There is no reading text in this 15 week, one term course. We read and share our own writing based on data from other courses, their lives, written and broadcast media. Technical and/or researched reports and documented essays are written in the next level of courses.

Bernice Lever Farrar

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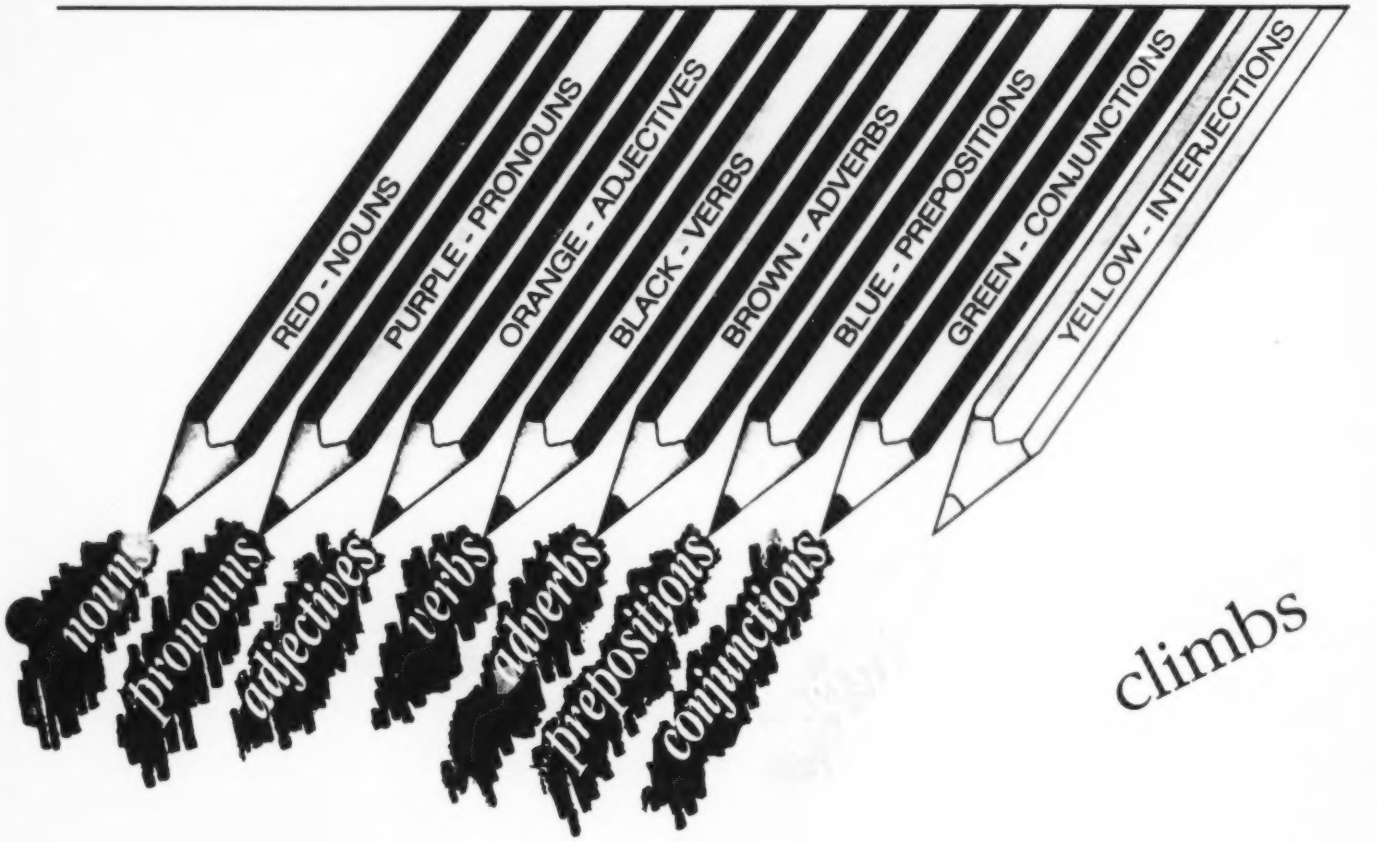
THE COLOUR OF WORDS

English Grammar Made Easy Using A Simple Colour System



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Date Filmed
April 29, 1993